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ABSTRACT

The speech briefly addresses a variety of educational needs emerging due to changing social and family influences. The view emphasizes education as life itself rather than preparation for life. Three propositions are developed from this view: 1) we must get away from the notion that education takes place only in a formalized setting; 2) we must recognize that education extends from birth through adulthood; and 3) our formal school curricula have been too "correct answer" oriented. (SJL)

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THE FAMILY AS EDUCATOR *

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I AM HONORED AND DELIGHTED TO HAVE BEEN ASKED TO PRESENT THE KEYNOTE ADDRESS TO THIS CHILD AND FAMILY CONFERENCE.

AT THIS POINT IN ANY SPEECH, HOWEVER, I AM REMINDED OF WHAT A COLLEAGUE OF MINE ONCE TOLD ME ABOUT HIS FIRST PUBLIC ADDRESS. HE KNEW HIS SUBJECT WELL AND HAD NO TROUBLE WRITING THE MIDDLE AND THE END OF HIS SPEECH, BUT HE WAS WORRIED ABOUT HOW TO BEGIN. FINALLY THE HOUR FOR THE SPEECH ARRIVED. THE YOUNG FELLOW TOOK HIS PLACE ON THE PODIUM AND BEGAN:

"LADIES AND GENTLEMEN, MY JOB THIS MORNING IS TO TALK. YOURS IS TO LISTEN. IF YOU FINISH YOUR JOB BEFORE I FINISH MINE, PLEASE DON'T DISTURB THE OTHERS AS YOU GO OUT."

LIKE MY FRIEND, I KNOW MY SUBJECT REASONABLY WELL AND HAD NO TROUBLE WITH THE MIDDLE AND END OF MY SPEECH. UNLIKE HIM, I HAD NO TROUBLE WITH THE BEGINNING EITHER.

I WOULD LIKE TO BEGIN MY TALK BY PROPOSING THAT WE RE-THINK THE DEFINITION OF FIVE WORDS THAT HAVE REACHED SUCH CURRENCY AMONG US THAT I WONDER WHETHER WE REALLY COMMUNICATE WITH EACH OTHER WHEN WE USE THEM. THE FIVE WORDS ARE:

- CHILD
- FAMILY
- COMMUNITY
- SCHOOL, AND --
- EDUCATION

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* PREPARED FOR THE CHILD AND FAMILY CONFERENCE; TEACHERS COLLEGE, COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY, NEW YORK, N.Y., OCTOBER 15, 1975, 9:30 A.M.

THIS CONFERENCE SEEMS TO ME A GOOD PLACE TO TALK ABOUT WHAT THESE TERMS SIGNIFY TODAY.

WE ARE VERY MUCH PREOCCUPIED IN OUR TIME WITH THE QUESTION OF AGE. WE CHANGE OUR PROFESSION, OUR PLACE OF RESIDENCE, EVEN OUR NAME. BUT OUR BIRTH DATE REMAINS THE SINGLE UNCHANGING ITEM OF IDENTIFICATION, FROM BIRTH CERTIFICATE TO GRAVESTONE. THIS MAGIC NUMBER PERMITS US TO DO SOME THINGS, PERVENTS US FROM DOING OTHER THINGS, AND CONDEMNS US TO DO STILL OTHERS. OUR BIRTH DATE CAN BE A BLESSING OR A BANE. EITHER WAY, IT IS AN EVER-PRESENT FACT OF OUR LIFE.

IT WAS NOT ALWAYS SO. SANCHO PANZA, DESCRIBING HIS DAUGHTER IN "DON QUIXOTE," SAID "SHE MAY BE FIFTEEN, OR TWO YEARS OLDER OR YOUNGER, YET SHE IS AS TALL AS A LANCE AND AS FRESH AS AN APRIL MORNING..."

THE POINT IS, THE FATHER NOT ONLY DID NOT KNOW HIS DAUGHTER'S EXACT AGE BUT DID NOT CONSIDER IT OF ANY REAL IMPORTANCE. CHILDREN WERE CHILDREN IN HIS EYES UNTIL THEY BECAME ADULTS, AND THEY BECAME ADULTS AS SOON AS THEY COULD FUNCTION RESPONSIBLY IN AN ADULT WORLD.

LLOYD DeMAUSE AND SOME OF HIS FELLOW HISTORIANS HAVE WRITTEN A LIVELY, INFORMATIVE, SOMETIMES STARTLING BOOK CALLED <u>THE HISTORY OF CHILDHOOD</u>. AMONG OTHER THINGS, THEY POINT OUT THAT THE FACTORY ACT OF 1802 WAS THE FIRST LEGISLATION IN ENGLAND INTENDED TO ASSURE THE WELL-BEING OF CITIZENS SOLELY BECAUSE THEY WERE YOUNG.

THE ACT OF 1802 APPLIED ONLY TO ORPHAN APPRENTICES WHO WERE WARDS OF THE STATE. NOT UNTIL 1889 DID THE BRITISH PARLIAMENT PASS A LAW TO PROTECT <u>ALL</u> CHILDREN FROM CRUELTY, AND THIS CAME, IN THE WORDS OF DeMAUSE AND HIS COLLEAGUES, "ONLY AFTER THE SOCIETY FOR THE PREVENTION OF CRUELTY TO ANIMALS HAD RECEIVED COMPLAINTS AND DECIDED THAT IT COULD HARDLY DRAW THE LINE AT PROTECTING ANIMALS."

WE HAVE COME A LONG WAY IN A RELATIVELY SHORT TIME IN THE RECOGNITION OF CHILDREN AS A DISTINCT CLASS OF CITIZENS WITH THEIR OWN UNIQUE CAPABILITIES, NEEDS, INTERESTS, AND RIGHTS. NOT TOO LONG AGO, PARENTS WERE STILL SWADDLING INFANTS, SENDING THEM OUT TO BE WET-NURSED, SELLING THEM INTO APPRENTICESHIP AT AN EARLY AGE, AND WORSE -- THE MOST HIDEOUS PRACTICE OF ALL, UNTHINKABLE IN OUR DAY -- SIMPLY MURDERING THOSE WHO WERE NOT WANTED, ESPECIALLY GIRLS.

WE KNOW MORE ABOUT CHILDREN TODAY AND, AS A GENERAL PROPOSITION, WE CARE MORE ABOUT CHILDREN TODAY. WE CONSIDER THEM A SPECIAL CLASS OF INDIVIDUALS TO BE NURTURED AND PROTECTED, ENJOYED AND RESPECTED.

AT THE SAME TIME, THERE IS STILL MUCH THAT WE DO NOT KNOW ABOUT CHILDREN. WE DO NOT REALLY KNOW HOW THEY LEARN, WHY THEY CHOOSE TO LEARN CERTAIN THINGS AND REJECT OTHERS, AND WHAT KINDS OF KNOWLEDGE ARE APPROPRIATE TO BE TAUGHT AT WHAT AGE.

JOHNNY ASKED HIS FATHER, "DAD, WHERE DID I COME FROM?" HE WAS AT THE APPROPRIATE AGE TO UNDERSTAND, SO HIS FATHER LAUNCHED INTO A FAIRLY LENGTHY AND SOPHISTICATED EXPLANATION. WHEN HE HAD FINISHED, JOHNNY SAT MOTIONLESS AND BEWILDERED. THE FATHER ASKED WHETHER THE EXPLANATION HAD SUFFICED.

"OH SURE, DAD," JOHNNY ANSWERED. "IT'S JUST THAT THE TEACHER ASKED TOMMY WHERE HE CAME FROM, AND HE SAID HE CAME FROM CHICAGO. I WAS JUST WONDERING WHERE I CAME FROM."

JUST AS WE MUST RECONSIDER OUR DEFINITION OF CHILDREN IN TODAY'S WORLD, WE MUST ALSO REVISE OUR THINKING ABOUT WHAT CONSTITUTES A FAMILY. FOR A GOOD MANY YEARS MOST OF US HAVE TALKED ABOUT <u>FAMILY</u> AS IF THE ONLY POSSIBLE COMBINATION WAS THE SO-CALLED "NUCLEAR FAMILY" OF HUSBAND, WIFE, OFFSPRING. BUT LAST YEAR THE DIVORCE RATE WENT UP SIX PERCENT WHILE THE

NUMBER OF MARRIAGES DECLINED BY TWO PERCENT. IN 1974 FIVE OUT OF SIX PRIMARY FAMILIES STILL WERE HOUSEHOLDS IN WHICH BOTH A HUSBAND AND WIFE WERE PRESENT, BUT SINCE 1970 THE LARGEST INCREASE AMONG FAMILY GROUPS HAS BEEN AMONG THOSE HEADED BY A WOMAN WHO HAD NO HUSBAND LIVING WITH HER. IN 1970 THE AVERAGE NUMBER OF PERSONS PER HOUSEHOLD IN THE UNITED STATES WAS 3.14. IN 1974 THE FIGURE HAD DROPPED TO 2.97. THE DECLINE IS ATTRIBUTABLE IN PART TO THE FALLING BIRTH RATE, IN PART TO THE INCREASING PROPORTION OF ADULTS WHO LIVE ALONE, IN PART TO THE INCREASE IN DIVORCES, AND IN PART TO THE FACT THAT MORE UNMARRIED YOUNG ADULTS ARE MAINTAINING A HOME.

THE TRADITIONAL PATTERN OF FAMILY LIFE IN AMERICA IS CHANGING, AND THE RAMIFICATIONS OF THE CHANGE ARE SIGNIFICANT AT ALL LEVELS. WHEN WE TALK ABOUT THE IMPORTANCE OF HOME-BASED PRESCHOOL EDUCATION, FOR EXAMPLE, WE MUST TAKE INTO ACCOUNT THE PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS OF EARLY CHILDHOOD TRAINING BY A SINGLE WORKING PARENT IN A HOUSEHOLD WHICH EXCLUDES GRANDPARENTS AND OTHER FAMILY MEMBERS.

CONCURRENT WITH THE CHANGING PATTERN OF FAMILY LIFE IN AMERICA IS THE CHANGING CONCEPT OF COMMUNITY. BACK IN THE DAYS WHEN MANY OF US LIVED ON A FARM OR IN A SMALL TOWN THE BOUNDARY LINES OF A NEIGHBORHOOD WERE FAIRLY WELL UNDERSTOOD, AT LEAST BY THE RESIDENTS OF EACH NEIGHBORHOOD. TODAY MOST OF US LIVE IN A LARGE METROPOLITAN AREA, AND WE DO NOT ALWAYS STAY IN THE SAME SPOT VERY LONG.

WHEN PEOPLE MOVE AROUND A LOT, THE LINES TRADITIONALLY DEMARCATING COMMUNITIES CAN GET PRETTY FUZZY. MANY OF US WOULD LIKE TO SEE A RETURN TO THE NEIGHBORHOOD SCHOOL, WITHOUT REALIZING THAT THE NEIGHBORHOOD ITSELF HAS TO MAKE A COMEBACK

FIRST. WHERE DO YOU PUT A NEIGHBORHOOD SCHOOL WHEN YOU CAN'T DEFINE THE BOUNDARIES OF THE NEIGHBORHOOD? WHAT IS THE DEFINITION OF A COMMUNITY AS WE ENTER THE FINAL QUARTER OF 20TH-CENTURY AMERICA?

WHAT ROLE WILL OUR SCHOOLS PLAY IN EDUCATING OUR CITIZENRY OVER THE NEXT TWO CENTURIES OF OUR NATIONAL LIFE? IN DAYS PAST THEY WERE A GATEWAY TO THE WORLD OUTSIDE THE COMMUNITY. IT WAS IN SCHOOL THAT A CHILD GAINED VICARIOUS EXPERIENCES IN THE WORLD BEYOND THE FAMILY DOORSTEP. THE VEHICLE FOR TRANSPORT INTO THIS OTHER WORLD WAS BOOKS. TELEVISION HAS CHANGED THAT. TODAY'S CHILD HAS A MAGIC CARPET IN FRONT OF THE TV SCREEN WHICH FLIES TO THE FAR CORNERS OF THE GLOBE, INDEED BEYOND THE GLOBE TO A RENDEZVOUS IN SPACE. A FARM CHILD CAN NOW SPEND AN EVENING AT THE BALLET, AND A CITY CHILD CAN OBSERVE BIRDS AND ANIMALS IN THEIR NATIVE HABITAT. TODAY'S CHILD HAS HAD AN INCREDIBLY RICH ARRAY OF VICARIOUS EXPERIENCE BEFORE EVER REACHING SCHOOL AGE.

WHICH BRINGS US TO THE WORD, EDUCATION. WHAT IS EDUCATION? GEORGE LEONARD TELLS US--AND THESE ARE HIS WORDS--"TO LEARN IS TO CHANGE. EDUCATION IS A PROCESS THAT CHANGES THE LEARNER."

I WOULD LIKE TO UNDERSCORE LEONARD'S WORD PROCESS. EDUCATION IS ACTION, SOMETHING GOING ON THAT IS DYNAMIC AND ALIVE. EDUCATION IS NOT A UNIVERSITY DEGREE, A HIGH SCHOOL DIPLOMA, OR AN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL CERTIFICATE. EDUCATION IS "WHAT'S HAPPENING," WHETHER IN CLASSROOM, HOME, OR STREET.

RATHER THAN PREPARATION FOR LIFE, EDUCATION IS LIFE ITSELF. IT IS THE INDISPENSABLE PROCESS BY WHICH THE SOCIETY RENEWS ITSELF AND GUARANTEES THE CONTINUANCE OF HUMAN CIVILIZATION, A CONSTANTLY RUNNING STREAM. TENNYSON MIGHT HAVE BEEN WRITING ABOUT EDUCATION WHEN HE SAID IN HIS IMMORTAL POEM, THE BROOK, THAT "MEN MAY COME AND MEN MAY GO, BUT I GO ON FOREVER."

WE ARE NOW BEGINNING TO APPRECIATE BETTER THE IMPORTANCE OF EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION AND THE ROLE PARENTS PLAY IN THIS PROCESS. I QUOTE FROM A REPORT ENTITLED PRESCHOOL AND PARENTAL EDUCATION:

> A MOST SIGNIFICANT TREND IN THE FORWARD MOVEMENT OF ORGANIZED EDUCATION IS TOWARD A CLOSER COORDINATION OF THE FACILITIES OF THE HOME AND OF THE SCHOOL. IF ONE WERE TO INQUIRE OF ANY STUDENT OF SOCIAL PROGRESS, "WHAT IS THE NEWEST DEVELOPMENT IN THE EDUCATIONAL WORLD?" THE ANSWER WOULD ALMOST SURELY BE, "SCHOOLS FOR INFANTS AND A CONSTRUCTIVE PROGRAM OF EDUCATION FOR PARENTS."

IT MAY ASTONISH THOSE OF US WHO FEEL THAT PRESCHOOL EDUCATION AND PARENT TRAINING ARE RELATIVELY NEW, TO LEARN THAT WHAT I HAVE JUST READ COMES FROM THE 1929 YEARBOOK OF THE NATIONAL SOCIETY FOR THE STUDY OF EDUCATION. A HALF-CENTURY AGO WE WERE SAYING THAT THE NAME OF THE GAME IS EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT AND PARENT TRAINING. OBVIOUSLY, NAMING THE GAME AND WINNING IT ARE NOT THE SAME THING.

IN SUMMARY, OUR IDEAS OF CHILDHOOD AND CHILDREN HAVE CHANGED. THE PATTERNS OF THE AMERICAN FAMILY HAVE CHANGED. COMMUNITY LIFE TODAY IS VASTLY DIFFERENT FROM WHAT IT WAS WHEN MOST OF OUR SCHOOL SYSTEMS WERE FORMED. I SUBMIT TO YOU THREE SIMPLE PROPOSITIONS:

FIRST, I THINK WE MUST GET AWAY FROM THE NOTION THAT EDUCATION TAKES PLACE ONLY IN A FORMALIZED SETTING. SCHOOLS ARE ESSENTIAL, TO BE SURE, BUT THEY ARE NOT THE ONLY FORUM FOR THE EXCHANGE OF INFORMATION AND THE ACQUISITION OF SKILLS. NOT EVERYTHING WORTH KNOWING IS LEARNED IN SCHOOL. (AND, UNFORTUNATELY, NOT EVERYTHING LEARNED IN SCHOOL IS WORTH KNOWING.)

SECOND, WE MUST DIVEST OURSELVES OF THE NOTION THAT EDUCATION OCCURS ONLY BETWEEN THE AGES OF SIX AND SIXTEEN, OR FOUR AND TWENTY. LEARNING BEGINS AT BIRTH, AND A VAST AMOUNT OF RESEARCH CONFIRMS THE IMPORTANCE OF DEVELOPING GOOD LEARNING SKILLS IN THE EARLY YEARS. WE NEED MODEST PROGRAMS OF PARENT EDUCATION TO BETTER EQUIP THOSE WHO HAVE TO HANDLE SOME OF THE PROBLEMS OF CHILD-REARING IN A COMPLEX SOCIETY.

THIRD, I BELIEVE OUR FORMAL SCHOOL CURRICULUMS HAVE BEEN TOO "CORRECT ANSWER" ORIENTED, AS THOUGH EDUCATION CONSISTED OF STUFFING A MIXTURE OF FACTS INTO LITTLE BODIES. GOOD THOUGHT PROCESSES ARE INFINITELY MORE VALUABLE THAN THE ABILITY TO REGURGITATE FACTS ON COMMAND.

EDUCATION, LIKE CHARITY, BEGINS AT HOME. NO CITIZEN EVER PLAYS A PROUDER ROLE, OR ACCEPTS A MORE IMPORTANT RESPONSIBILITY, THAN PARENTHOOD. CHILD-REARING IS EACH GENERATION'S INVESTMENT IN THE PROMISE OF THE HUMAN CONDITION, THE EXPRESSION OF EACH GENERATION'S FAITH IN THE FUTURE OF MANKIND.

WE NEED A FRESH RECOGNITION OF THE CRITICAL POSITION OF THE FAMILY IN SOCIETY AND A NEW AWARENESS OF THE ROLE OF THE FAMILY AS EDUCATOR IN MODERN TIMES.

I BELIEVE THE FAILURE OF OUR SCHOOLS TO COPE WITH THE PROBLEMS OF DRUG ABUSE, VIOLENCE, AND OTHER ANTI-SOCIAL BEHAVIOR STEMS FROM THE MISDIRECTED PLACING OF THESE BURDENS ON THE SCHOOL IN THE FIRST PLACE. MORAL ATTITUDES, SOCIAL BEHAVIOR--AND LEARNING HABITS AS WELL--SHOULD BE TAUGHT AT HOME. IF PROPERLY ATTENDED TO THERE, THEY WILL NOT BECOME BURDENS FOR THE SCHOOL, AND THE SCHOOLS CAN GET BACK TO THE BUSINESS OF ACADEMIC INSTRUCTION.

THE STATISTICIANS TELL US THAT ELEMENTARY SCHOOL ENROLLMENT WILL CONTINUE TO DECLINE OVER THE NEXT DECADE. WHY NOT CONSIDER SOME REALLOCATION OF SCHOOL FACILITIES AND RESOURCES TO PARENT EDUCATION?

I DO NOT MEAN TO IMPLY THAT SCHOOLS SHOULD TELL PARENTS HOW TO RAISE THEIR CHILDREN. I AM SIMPLY SUGGESTING A FORM OF COOPERATION BETWEEN SCHOOLS AND FAMILIES FOR THE BENEFIT OF BOTH. AMONG SUBJECT AREAS THAT MIGHT BE EXPLORED ARE HOME HEALTH CARE AND NUTRITION, NEW DEVELOPMENTS IN CHILD PSYCHOLOGY, ARTS AND CRAFTS PROJECTS FOR FUN AND LEARNING IN THE HOME, HOW-TO COURSES IN THE MAKING OF INSTRUCTIONAL TOYS, BASIC NUMBER AND READING CONCEPTS, GAMES TO DEVELOP SENSORY PERCEPTION, AND SO ON.

I DARESAY THERE ARE FEW AMONG US WHO WOULD NOT PROFIT FROM INSTRUCTIONAL AID IN THESE CATEGORIES, AND THERE WOULD BE AN EXTRA DIVIDEND TO PARENTS IN GETTING TOGETHER TO SWAP STORIES AND IDEAS FROM THEIR OWN EXPERIENCE FOR MUTUAL BENEFIT.

CONCURRENT WITH FORGING A NEW PARTNERSHIP BETWEEN THE FAMILY AND THE SCHOOL, I WOULD LIKE TO SEE A REVITALIZATION OF THE SPIRIT OF EACH COMMUNITY AS A SHAPING INFLUENCE IN THE EDUCATION OF ITS RESIDENTS.

AMERICA'S STRENGTH IS HER DIVERSITY, AND THERE IS NO MORE APPROPRIATE TIME THAN OUR BICENTENNIAL YEAR TO REAWAKEN THE SENSE OF COMMUNITY. IT IS SAD ENOUGH, I THINK, TO EXCLUDE GRANDPARENTS FROM THE FAMILY. IT IS UNFORGIVABLE TO SHUT THEM OUT OF THE COMMUNITY. I BELIEVE THE STRATIFICATION OF AMERICAN SOCIETY ALONG AGE LINES HAS BEEN OVERDONE, TO THE DETRIMENT, PARTICULARLY, OF ITS YOUNGEST MEMBERS.

ALL GENERATIONS SHOULD SHARE IN THE EDUCATIONAL PROCESS, AND THERE IS NO BETTER VEHICLE FOR THAT SHARING THAN THE WHOLE COMMUNITY, WITH ITS MANY-SIDED INTERESTS AND MULTI-FACETED TALENTS.

I DO NOT BELIEVE THAT WE NEED A LOT OF NEW PROGRAMS TO IMPROVE EDUCATION IN AMERICA. I BELIEVE WE NEED TO RE-CYCLE SOME GOOD IDEAS THAT WORKED IN THE PAST. WE NEED A NEW OPTIMISM ABOUT THE FUTURE, TOO, AND A FRESH COMMITMENT TO GET IT ALL TOGETHER.